

Maryland

J

87

.M322

1920

Maryland. Governor

Address
of
Governor Albert C. Ritchie
to the
Special Session
of the
General Assembly of Maryland

SEPTEMBER 20, 1920

U. OF MD. LIBRARY

MARYLAND & RARE BOOK ROOM
UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND LIBRARY
COLLEGE PARK, MD.

Maryland
J.

87

.M322

1920

LIBRARY—COLLEGE PARK



DO NOT CIRCULATE



Governor Ritchie's Address

to the

SPECIAL SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF MARYLAND

September 20, 1920

Members of the General Assembly:

I have called you together in special session to meet an extraordinary emergency—such as 'extraordinary occasion' as the Constitution contemplates shall alone justify the calling of a special session of the Legislature.

The Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States has been ratified, adopted and proclaimed. Tennessee was accepted by the Federal Government as the thirty-sixth State, but whatever doubt may have existed as to the validity of Tennessee's act of ratification has been rendered immaterial by the subsequent ratification of the thirty-seventh State, Connecticut. There is, therefore, no longer any doubt that the Nineteenth Amendment is part of the organic law of the nation, that under it the women of the country have been enfranchised and that they will be entitled to vote at the approaching and at all subsequent elections.

It now becomes the duty of Maryland to do what Maryland has always done, namely, abide by a judgment deliberately pronounced in accordance with the spirit of our institutions—whether it be pronounced by a majority of the people, as in many cases, or by three-fourths of the States, as in this case—

and abide by that judgment willingly and cheerfully, and with hope, born of our faith in our institutions, that a Constitutional amendment adopted in accordance with the orderly processes of our organic law, will redound to our country's good.

LAWS NOW INADEQUATE

It is, therefore, our part to see that the new franchise conferred by the Nineteenth Amendment is made completely effective. Legislation is necessary for this because, as I showed in detail when giving notice of the call, the existing registration laws are entirely inadequate to register in addition to the men entitled, even a reasonable percentage of the women entitled; and they are also inadequate to care for the greatly increased vote on election day.

This legislation must be passed at once, for if it is not passed at once a great number of the women whom the Nineteenth Amendment has enfranchised, and who are sure to apply for registration, will be unable to exercise their Constitutional right of suffrage, because of inadequate registration and voting facilities.

This clearly presents such an extraordinary occasion as justifies, indeed makes necessary, the calling of a special session of the General Assembly.

WANTS SUFFRAGE "EQUAL"

We want, I think, to provide for the necessary additional registration and voting facilities, not only completely and effectively, and with every possible regard for the convenience and care of the women of the State whom we are now welcoming to exercise them; but we should do so with that dignity for which a solemn occasion calls and which, I feel, the women of Maryland look for in the men of Maryland, and this, among other things, should exclude measures recognizing distinctions, having no solid foundation at all, between the men and the women in the manner of exercising the right of surage.

This right is the rock of our institutions and it is priceless. The safeguards and the procedure thrown around it by existing laws are neither arbitrary nor without reason. All of

them are the result of long, practical experience. They have for their object the prevention of fraud and the purity of the ballot. The enfranchisement of a new and large class of voters does not justify eliminating or impairing any of them, or discriminating between men and women.

I think that the women should register and vote subject to the same procedure and conditions under which the men register and vote, and I believe that the Maryland women themselves neither expect nor want any discrimination in their favor in the manner of performing the high and solemn responsibility which they are now ready to accept and exercise.

PROGRAM ANNOUNCED

In order to give the additional facilities for registration and voting, which are now necessary, it seems to me, after consultation with a great many experienced city and county people, that the following changes in the election laws are necessary to be made:

1. Provide two additional registration days in Baltimore city and each of the counties for the year 1920. This would make for 1920 seven registration days in Baltimore city instead of five, and four registration days in the counties instead of two, together with a subsequent day for revision.

2. Make the hours for registration in the counties for this and future years from 9 A. M. to 9 P. M., instead of 8 A. M. to 7 P. M., as at present. There seems no need to change the existing hours for registration in Baltimore city, which are from 12 M. to 10 P. M.

3. At present, the polls are open on election day in Baltimore city from 6 A. M. to 5 P. M.. In the counties, the polls are open from 8 A. M. to 6 P. M., except in Baltimore county, where they close at 7 P. M., and in three election districts in Wicomico county and one precinct in Worcester county, where they open at 6 A. M. It is recommended that in Bal-

timore city and all of the counties the polls hereafter open at 6 A. M. and close at 7 P. M.

FOR MORE POLLING PLACES

4. Confer authority upon the Election Supervisors in Baltimore city and in the counties, in their discretion, to provide one additional polling place in any precinct, or in any district not divided into precincts wherein, after the fall's registration of both women and men has been completed, more than 800 persons are registered. Provision should, of course, be made, in case this discretion is exercised for the necessary additional judges and clerks, and also for an alphabetical division of the voters of the precinct or district, so that those whose surnames run from A to M may vote at one polling place and those from N to Z at the other.

5. Make a slight change in the registration requirements to cover the case of women claiming citizenship by marriage and the recording of the sex of the applicant.

6. Provide a few additional clerks for the Election Supervisors of Baltimore city, which seems necessary to take care of the greatly increased registration. In the counties the existing law already gives authority for additional clerks when required.

ADDITIONAL COMPENSATION

7. Provide some additional compensation to the judges and clerks for their longer hours and greatly increased work on election day. It would seem that an increase of \$2 over their present compensation (which varies in different localities) would be fair.

8. Finally, provide for the payment by Baltimore city and the counties, respectively, of the increased expenses which the above recommendations, if adopted, will entail.

The program is brief and simple and I hope that the Legislature will confine itself to a consideration of these measures, or of others which, like them, can fairly be said to be related to the purpose for which this session has been called. I do not, of course, mean that measures other than those above recommended may not be related, and the General Assembly is and should be the judge of what measures are related and are needed to accomplish the purpose of the session. But measures which have no relation at all to this purpose are easily recognized, and it is of these only that I am speaking.

I know, of course, that under the Constitution the Executive has no right to limit the measures which the Legislature may consider to those embraced within the subject which the Legislature has been called to consider; and in expressing the hope that this Legislature will confine itself to measures which it considers are related to the subject of the call, I feel that, far from undertaking to interfere with the constitutional rights of this body, I am in reality simply voicing what is the wish of certainly the great majority of the members.

LEARNED MEMBERS' VIEWS

I have talked or communicated with many of the members recently, and have learned the views of others indirectly. Almost without exception, these members feel that if one measure upon a subject unrelated to the call is considered other measures will be considered also, with the result that an extended session would be certain; and that this would be most unfortunate for many reasons—among others, it would cost the taxpayers in the neighborhood of \$2,000 per day; it would, with a national campaign in progress, offer opportunity for political and partisan maneuvers; it would needlessly delay the members themselves in returning to their respective employments at one of the busiest times of the whole year, especially for the farmers.

The members I have talked with feel that such considerations make it my duty to discourage, in every proper way, the consideration of measures which are clearly not related to the purpose of the call and saying what I have said I feel that I am simply reflecting the wishes of the great majority of this body, and certainly the wishes of the people of the State.

And now, members of the General Assembly, I leave you to your deliberations with entire confidence that you will bring to them that sincerity of mind and purpose which, from past association and personal friendship, I so well know you possess."

DO NOT CIRCULATE



UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND LIBRARY